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After a recent article was published in the IndyStar concerning a Hamilton County park, the members of the park board felt it was necessary to make a statement in order to set the record straight and hopefully help our community and supporters better understand our department's involvement.

What might not be readily apparent to those that read the story, is the fact that Hamilton County Parks and Recreation has the utmost respect for the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, a federally recognized tribe with aboriginal rights to Central Indiana. Initiating and maintaining a relationship, with the tribe for the past five years has required a genuine effort, so as to avoid mistrust born of unfamiliarity – of both parties. Both Hamilton County Parks and the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma have exhibited a desire to continue to work together toward what they hope will be a long and mutually beneficial relationship. Maintaining an understanding of both parties' cultures, needs, wishes and sensitivities is key.

As for the archaeological details contained in the article, respected members within the archaeological community have come forward to professionally set the record straight. Nonetheless, there remain a few issues the board wishes to address. The Hamilton County Park Department has not been notified of, nor paid any fines. The park department is in receipt of a letter dated in 2013 from the Chief of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, to the NAGPRA Compliance Officer, National Park Service, and National NAGPRA, acknowledging and expressing deep appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the park department in its work with the Miami and other historic tribes of Indiana. The letter further reports that the Hamilton County Park and Recreation Department has achieved compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Following that correspondence, the issue of the approximately 86,000 additional artifacts arose. Park department representatives and legal counsel have had meetings and discussions with numerous, highly regarded professionals from archaeological and science disciplines, in an effort to identify a balance of archaeology, anthropology, science, and spirituality involved in the work that has been undertaken, along with academic attempts to determine what life activities may have occurred at our park 800-1,000 years ago, keeping in mind it was before any written record existed. These professionals agree that none of the artifacts mentioned above meet the definition of an item covered under NAGPRA, and that the most likely accurate interpretation of the sites align with what the department was originally told by the archaeologist responsible for the work and subsequent reports. Lastly, at no time were school children digging in archaeological sites. In fact, the soil that the supervised school groups were in contact with, had previously been professionally excavated, and would not have been used if deemed sensitive in nature. It is also worth noting that items such as teeth are commonly found at sites and are not covered under NAGPRA because they are items typically shed throughout life.

In closing, the Hamilton County Park Board will continue its commitment to being a good steward of the land and comply with federal and state laws. We support and have confidence in our employees and director.

Sincerely,

Andrew T. Prather, President
Hamilton County Park Board



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